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## THE OLD FORT AT ANAHUAC.

ADÈLE B. LOOSCAN.

On the shore of Galveston Bay, near the mouth of the Trinity River, and about half a mile south of the town of Anahuac, are to be seen the ruins of an old Mexican fort, erected in 1832. Its walls have long since been levelled to the ground, many of the bricks used in their construction have been utilized in various ways, but the outlines of its foundation may still be traced, and with the aid of the recollection of descendants of early settlers, whose childhood was passed near it, its site may be accurately located. Its history is that of the rebellion of Texan colonists against Mexican oppression, of their punishment by imprisonment within its walls, which were put up by the forced labor of colonial mechanics. The half-buried bricks of this ruin, which, according to primitive custom, were moulded by hand, are endued with a new interest, when we know Texan prisoners were made to contribute their labor by tramping the clay, as well as moulding the bricks for the walls of the fort.

In 1832, when the troubles between the citizens and Col. Juan Davis Bradburn first began, the latter was poorly equipped to take care of political prisoners, so Patrick C. Jack and Wm. B. Travis, the first who were arrested for expressing themselves too freely in regard to his arbitrary conduct, were imprisoned in a house contiguous to his own quarters.

Dr. N. D. Labadie, who had been living at Anahuac since March 2nd, 1831, relates the following particulars in regard to the building of the brick fort. He says, that the wants of Jack and Travis while in prison were attended by one of the slaves of James Morgan; that in a bundle of clothing, prepared by the prisoners for the laundress, a letter marked O. P. Q., requesting that "a horse should be in readiness at a certain hour on Thursday night," was found by the Mexican officer of the day. "The finding of this letter," says Dr. Labadie, "caused Bradburn much uneasiness, and, combined with other events, determined him to secure his prison-

ers more effectually. As he was laying the foundation of a fort near Anahuac, a large brick kiln had just been emptied, and all the masons and carpenters were forced to go down and put it up for a prison. In the course of a week the work was completed, and two large cannons placed on a platform near by. The two prisoners were now to be conducted to the new prison. The whole garrison was put under arms. The cavalry made a display at the head of a column. The letter to O. P. Q. had caused a double line of sentry to be placed inside with the prisoners, who were thus doubly guarded in order to be kept safe till the whole force of the garrison was ordered out to conduct the prisoners to the new place of confinement." In another part of the same narrative it is recorded that, some ten or fifteen men who were taken prisoners by the Mexicans in one of the skirmishes between the latter and the citizens, during those troubles, were put to hard labor, tramping clay and moulding it into bricks. Thus, not only was the old fort built by the compulsory labor of colonial carpenters and masons, but its very bricks were made and moulded by the feet and hands of prisoners taken while fighting in defense of their liberties.

But this state of things could not continue long, and the determined action of the citizen soldiery at that time, no doubt, had a powerful influence in shaping the conciliatory policy which prevailed during the ensuing year. In the fall of 1832 Colonel Souverein, who had succeeded Bradburn in command of the garrison, chartered two schooners from Wm. and David Harris and with the garrison sailed for Tampico. However, the evacuation of the fort was temporary, for, on May 30th, Stephen F. Austin wrote from Matamoras, that, "Mr. George Fisher will leave here shortly to enter upon the duties of Collector of Galveston, with only a sufficient number of troops for necessary guards." \* \* \*

Anahuac was known as the Port of Galveston, and here the revenue officer had his official station, but history is silent with regard to the official acts of George Fisher, and it was not until June, 1835, that little Anahuac again became the scene of resistance to oppression; this time, Wm. B. Travis and Patrick Jack, the former prisoners, performed the part of "rescuers of the imprisoned." The story is best told by letters of actors which explain and correct certain erroneous statements in historical records.

The following is a copy of a letter from D. W. C. Harris, of Harrisburg, Texas, to relatives and friends in Waterloo, New York:

HARRISBURG, TEXAS, August 17, 1835.

Dear Friends—On the 10th of June I went to Anahuac (about fifty miles from Harrisburg) to purchase some goods of a Mr. Briscoe; after purchasing my goods, I was informed that I could not remove them from town, until I got a *gefe* from the custom house; this I was determined not to do, if I could avoid it. The evening previous to my intended departure there were several guards placed around Mr. Briscoe's store, to see that nothing was removed. About eight o'clock a young man came to the store and asked Briscoe for a box to put ballast in; this Mr. Briscoe gave him, and he placed it on a wheelbarrow filled with brick and started for the beach; after he left the store I observed to Mr. Briscoe that we could now ascertain whether my goods would be stopped or not. Shortly after, we heard the young man calling for Mr. Smith, the interpreter. Mr. Briscoe and I then walked up to the young man, and found that he had been stopped by the guard. Mr. Smith soon came up and informed the guard of the contents of the box; this appeared to satisfy him, and the box was taken to the beach, Mr. Briscoe and I going with the young man. After the box was put in the boat and we were about returning, ten or twelve Mexican soldiers came on us and ordered us to stand. Mr. Briscoe and I were taken prisoners. As we were ascending the bank a young man named Wm. Smith came down the hill, and when within ten feet of us was shot down, the ball passing through the right breast; (he is recovering). Mr. Briscoe and I were then put in the calaboose, where I remained until next day at 11 o'clock, when I was liberated, Briscoe still being detained. I immediately came to Harrisburg and made statements of the facts, which were sent to San Felipe, and on the 24th of June an order came from San Felipe for the Mexicans to be disarmed, which was done on the 27th. \* \* \*

CLINTON.

Further particulars with regard to the order, which came from San Felipe, "for the Mexicans at Anahuac to be disarmed," so briefly alluded to by De Witt Clinton Harris, are as follows: A company of about twenty men met at Harrisburg, elected Wm. B. Travis captain, mounted a six-pound cannon on truck wheels used for hauling logs to the saw mill, put it on board the sloop "Ohio," and proceeded to Anahuac, where they landed and captured the garrison of forty Mexicans, under command of Capt. Tenorio. The following is a list of a few of the men who went on this unique

naval expedition: P. C. Jack, D. and S. Harris, Jno. Iiams, Jno. Brock, Capt. Hunnings, E. Ray, J. Wilcox, Jr., and H. Callahan. A. B. Dodson, whose bride, a few months afterward, made the first Lone Star flag of Texas, and presented it to a company of which he was first lieutenant, went as far as Vince's, a few miles below Harrisburg, where he was detained on important business.

Important facts relating to the same affair are contained in the following letter from Travis to Henry Smith, who soon afterwards became Provisional Governor of Texas:

SAN FELIPE, July 6, 1835.

My Dear Sir—I hasten to write you a line by Mr. W. M. Smith, who is on hand to start for Columbia.

I have only time to say that I returned last evening from a successful expedition to Anahuac. On the 21st ultimo resolutions were adopted here recommending that, in connection with the general defence of the country against military sway, the troops of Anahuac should be disarmed and ordered to leave Texas. In addition to that, I had been invited to go to Anahuac for the above purpose by several of my friends, who are the principal citizens of that place, and who were suffering under the despotic rule of the military.

Under these circumstances, I set out for Galveston Bay, raised a volunteer company of twenty men on Buffalo Bayou and San Jacinto, and being elected captain of the company, I proceeded to Anahuac in the sloop "Ohio," with a six-pounder mounted on board. We landed on the 29th, took possession of the place, and commenced active offensive operations. On the morning of the 30th the troops, about forty in number, capitulated, delivered us sixty-four stands of arms (muskets and bayonets), and agreed to leave Texas immediately under parole, never to serve against the people of Texas. I sent them bag and baggage on board the sloop, and they are now on the march without arms to La Bahia.

This act has been done with the most patriotic motives, and I hope you and my fellow citizens generally will approve it or excuse it. \* \* \*

As ever, your friend,

TRAVIS.

This decisive action in disarming Mexican soldiers made plain the determination of Texans to no longer submit quietly to tyranny, and the part borne by Travis in the affair presaged the unrivalled heroism of his character. He was a warm friend of Andrew Briscoe, and when informed that "his friends were suffering

under the despotic rule of the military," friendship united with patriotism in emphasizing the ardor of his feelings. Nevertheless, public sentiment was by no means unanimous in approving the act, and Travis was sharply attacked by what was known at the time as the Peace Party or Submission Men. In a letter dated August 5, 1835, he alludes to a document or card published through the solicitations of friends, which probably entered into an explanation of his course, and which he seems to have regretted. In the same letter he says: "I know that I acted by the consent and approbation of the political authorities, I know that the people here all favored the measure, and I went into it believing it to be right and that it would meet the approbation of all; and, as you say, time can only determine whether it was a good or bad measure. \* \* \* Conscious that I have not intentionally erred, I bid defiance to any who may be disposed to persecute me, and feel assured that I have numerous friends to sustain me in it." \* \* \*

The following letter from Wm. B. Travis to Andrew Briscoe, for whose release he had suffered much blame at the hands of the Peace Party, shows the confidential relations existing between them. His allusion to Mr. Briscoe's publication, which was probably one of those circulars printed with the pen and posted up in public places for the purpose of arousing the people, shows that they were one in patriotic sentiment, and that neither faltered in the performance of duty. The letter also shows the happy change in public sentiment which had been wrought in the space of a few weeks, as well as the excited condition of the country.

SAN FELIPE, August 31, 1835.

My Dear Sir—I have not written to you before, because I was ashamed to tell what was going on. It is different now. Although the Mexican or Tory party made a tremendous effort to put us down, principle has triumphed over prejudice, passion, cowardice, and knavery. All their measures have recoiled upon them, and they are routed horse and foot. The extent of their glory was to denounce us to the military at San Antonio and Matamoras, and demand our arrest. An order was accordingly issued to Ugartachea, and repeated by Cos, to arrest seven of us and send us to Bexar to be tried by martial law. This was too much for the people to bear. When they were called on by an usurping political chief to carry these orders into execution, the sacrifice was too great. Their wrath was turned against the Tories and Spanish-Americans, who now dare not hold up their heads. The people call

now loudly for a convention, in which their voice shall be heard. They have become almost completely united. And now let *Tories*, *submission men*, and Spanish invaders look out.

There is to be a great meeting here on the 12th of September, on the subject of a convention. The Tories are dying a violent death, and their last expiring struggle will be made on that day. Therefore I invite you to attend, and hope you will do so. We wish to beat them in their stronghold, and I have no doubt we shall do so. But I wish to see them overwhelmed. I have seen your publication. It does you credit. You have shown yourself the real white man and uncompromising patriot. Stick to the text and Texas is saved.

I have this moment finished conversing with a Mexican just from San Antonio. He says marching orders have been given to the troops. They are to be here by the 12th or 15th of September to garrison this town, Tenoxtitlan, and Nacogdoches with 200 men each; and it is concerted that 200 men shall arrive by water at Anahuac at about the same time to garrison that place. They have sworn vengeance against all engaged in the late expedition, and in that of 1832 at Anahuac and Velasco. They calculate to take up these men, with the aid of the other Americans, by which time they will gradually bring in troops enough to overrun the people and keep them in vile submission. They can not do it. We will not submit to be garrisoned here. I hope you will not there. We shall give them hell if they come here. Keep a bright look out to sea. Allow no pilots in the bay to assist them, and they can not land before you have time to prepare for them. Secure all the powder and lead. Remember that war is not to be waged without means. Let us be men and Texas will triumph. I know you can be relied on; therefore I exhort you to be active in preparing the minds of men for the scenes that are to be enacted.

News from Orleans that we will be liberally aided with men, money and arms has arrived. Already we have five pieces of cannon, 100 kegs of powder, and lead and shot to correspond, landed in Matagorda, and sent from Orleans.

Come over if you can on the 12th. My respects to Wilcox and others. Please write soon.

Your friend,

W. B. TRAVIS.

In spite of the proclamations of Capt. Thomas M. Thompson, who, from the Mexican war schooner "Correo," assumed a petty jurisdiction over Galveston Bay and the citizens of Anahuac, forbidding the organization of militia, and insolently threatening to hang Travis at his yard arm in half an hour after he should be captured, Mexican rule at Anahuac could never be reinstated; the

little sloop "Ohio" and its heroic crew had done their work effectually; the fort was never again to know the tread of a Mexican garrison, nor its prison doors to close upon another political prisoner.

Guided by the old letters to which attention has been invited, I have been able to obtain authentic data in regard to this old Texas landmark.

The Wilcox mentioned in the letter of Travis to Andrew Briscoe was Capt. Chas. Wilcox, who settled in Anahuac in 1831, was present when the corner stone of the fort was laid, and lived there continuously up to the time of his death. From one of his sons, Geo. E. Wilcox, resident at Temple, the following description of the old fort was obtained:

"My earliest recollection of the Mexican fort at Anahuac is after the walls had been torn down to a level with the top of the hill or bank of the bay shore on which it was built.

"The fort was about 30x40 feet in the clear, built with the western side fronting and immediately on the bank. The bank had been excavated to a distance of ten feet, with the side next to the bay entirely open. This opening was closed up with heavy walls of brick and lighter brick walls were built around the other three sides, and from the rear or eastern side of the fort there were two passageways underground, leading back to a large magazine some forty yards back on the hill, under the surface, which passage could be used as an exit from the fort.

"On the exposed part of the fort there was a brick wall about four feet thick. In the corner stone, among other things, there is a Mexican dollar. My father saw the corner stone laid. \* \* \* There were only two cannon in the fort; they were about six-pound iron guns. One of them can be seen at Anahuac today."

Unfortunately, the rumor that money was buried in or near the fort has caused the ground to be dug up by treasure hunters, and in this way its otherwise clear outlines have been defaced.

A Confederate fort, called Fort Chambers, was built during the Civil War about half way between the Mexican fort and Anahuac, opposite Brown's Flats. Two cannon are said to have been mounted there, but they were afterwards conveyed to Galveston and placed at the corners in front of Artillery Hall.



There is no doubt about the cannon now in the possession of W. D. Wilcox at Anahuac having been left there by the Mexicans.

References:

"Narrative of the Anahuac or Opening Campaign of the Texas Revolution," by N. D. Labadie, Texas Almanac, 1859.

"Life of Henry Smith," by John Henry Brown.

Letters of D. W. C. Harris, Wm. B. Travis, A. B. Dodson, and Geo. E. Wilcox.